Reform of Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting for Individual Learners

A Discussion Paper

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND
MINISTRY RESPONSIBLE FOR MULTICULTURALISM
AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Province of
British Columbia

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March, 1992

Assessment, Evaluation and Standards Division

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I. INTRODUCTION

Position Statements:

The major purpose of standards is to support each student's learning.

Standards should be developed in consultation with those who use and are affected by them.

The Ministry has the responsibility to establish standards in education for the Province.

This paper began as "A Discussion Paper on Assessment, Evaluation, and Standards" developed by the Assessment, Evaluation, and Standards Division in consultation with representatives from many Branches in the Ministry and the Program Teams. Thirteen regional presentations to district staffs, presentations to the BCTF Forum on Evaluation, and to BCCPAC and to EAC widened the representation of views on the positions described. An invitation to the participants to respond in writing to the ideas presented followed the meetings. This document incorporates concerns expressed and new ideas offered. Essentially the paper proposes changes in assessment, evaluation, and reporting and is intended to influence current practice.

Prompted by the adoption of 78 of the 83 recommendations proposed by the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education, the *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning* gave direction for changes to the curriculum/assessment process necessary to prepare students for the future. In its principles of curriculum and assessment, the framework document states that:

- Curriculum and assessment should be learner focused.
- Assessment and reporting should help students make informed choices.

This paper focuses on standards, what they are, how they support learning, and the role they play in assessment, evaluation, and reporting on student performance. Assessment, evaluation, and reporting are viewed as integral parts of the teaching-learning process, intended to support the development of successful learners. To do this, assessment and evaluation should be implemented based on the following principles:

- assessment should be an on-going process;
- a variety of assessment methods should be used;
- information about student learning should be regularly collected and used to improve provincial curricula;
- assessment and reporting to students and parents should be based on the goals and learning dimensions outlined in the *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*;

- all assessment procedures used must be reliable and valid according to the technical standards of test development;
- student self-assessment and evaluation should be an integral part of the instructional process;
- decisions that impact students should be based on multiple sources of information;
- assessment and evaluation should nurture positive attitudes about learning in students.

This paper outlines the process by which standards will be developed to meet these intentions and includes timelines for development that support consultation and research.

II. CONTEXT

In A Legacy for Learners, Sullivan pointed out that evaluation is typically conducted at several different levels: individual, class, school, district, and province. Sullivan felt that the Ministry should maintain its focus on evaluation at the individual level. The Commission's recommendations for changes to the provincial assessment and evaluation programs included modifications to the Grade 12 provincial examinations, modifications to the Learning Assessment Program, the development of explicit and detailed standards to allow for the monitoring of individual progress, and the broadening of evidence used by teachers as a basis for their evaluations. This paper focuses on assessment practices as they relate to the individual learner.

"The Ministry should provide guidance on standards and criteria for teachers to employ in evaluating students' performance." [A Legacy for Learners, p. 111]

"This is a time for educators to re-examine the priorities and assumptions, often unstated, that shape programs and influence practice, and to make changes in order to improve learning opportunities." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 29]

"The Commission recommends: That provincial Grade 12 examinations be extended to all subject areas..." [A Legacy for Learners, p. 118]

The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning was based on the findings of the Royal Commission and provided specific direction to the development of assessment and evaluation policies. These included the need to develop "statements about the expectations for, or indicators of, learning development concerning knowledge, skills, and attitudes." The summary of The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning stated: "Our challenge is to move to a more outcomes focused system, in which judgments about student learning are based more on meeting high expectations and attaining standards and less on performance relative to the group... To develop a system in which all learners can succeed, with effort, requires new ways of organizing for learning." New ways of organizing for learning require new ways of approaching assessment and evaluation.

"Assessment in a continuous learning environment implies that methods of collecting evidence of learning will be used frequently, and that assessment tools should be made available at appropriate times to enable the learner to demonstrate what he or she can do." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 9]

The Primary, Intermediate, and Graduation Programs elaborated further on these positions, recommending changes in provincial assessment and evaluation procedures. Recently, the Ministry published and distributed to the field the document Supporting Learning to encourage dialogue about expectations in the Primary Program. The process to date has been one of developing common understandings about the interrelated nature of learning, teaching, and evaluation.

"Sometimes assessment is done... to identify areas where the teacher needs to consider alternative teaching approaches to meet learning needs, or areas where the individual learners need to place greater effort." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 11]

III. STANDARDS

This section of the paper presents the view that standards should be explicit, be richly and comprehensively exemplified, be based on authentic assessment practices, provide a common frame of reference for observing, evaluating, and reporting on student performance, and be broadly communicated.

Standards in Educational Practice

The Year 2000 established that the student, the teacher, and the parent are key decision-makers in the educational process. In this context, standards have two main purposes. The first is to enable students, teachers, and parents to set goals and directions for personal and educational endeavour. The second is to allow them to judge the extent to which they have attained their goals. For both purposes, standards need to be stated explicitly to enable effective communication among the decision-makers.

"Assessment should be seen by students and parents as an integral part of the learning activities going on in school." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 10]

When the term "standard" is used in this paper, its definition includes both an accepted example of something against which student performance is *compared* and a measure of excellence or quality. The "examples" provide a *frame of reference*, which could be descriptions with representative samples of what students are able to do. These descriptions can illustrate a range of student performance. "Excellence or quality" is individually determined based on the widely-held *expectations* for an individual or group.

"The standards supplied should be sufficiently explicit and detailed to allow for the monitoring of individual progress..." [A Legacy for Learners, p. 111]

Standards are often considered compulsory by implication, because the term is so often used in conjunction with *requirements*. It should be noted, however, that the concept of "requirement" is separate from the "example" or "level" represented by a standard.

Therefore, the concepts central to the definition of standards are frames of reference, comparisons, expectations, and requirements.

"Evaluation should be continuous and should be used for diagnostic purposes as well as for determining whether or not achievement of goals will have been attained." [A Legacy for Learners, p. 111]

1. Frames of Reference

In broad terms, the frames of reference provide a backdrop against which a student's learning can be viewed in relation to his or her development. Developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessment take into ac-

count the developmental levels of learners at various stages. A frame of reference contains a generally accepted set of examples and descriptions that illustrate widely-held expectations of student performance at various stages. Teachers can refer to the appropriate frame of reference when making judgments about student performance in a given area or "Learning Dimension" as outlined in the Year 2000 document. We are calling this type of frame of reference a "reference set."

"Teachers can maintain collections of individual learner's work as an ongoing record of the learning that each individual has demonstrated. These collections also provide convenient summaries of learners' accomplishments for use in parent conferences." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 11]

Reference sets offer a framework for observing, evaluating, and reporting on student performance. At the same time, teachers can use them to assist in planning for learning and in goal setting. The development of reference sets requires the use of a variety of judgments about learning and how learning develops in individuals.

"Each provincial program will provide... descriptive statements of expectation for learning development and, where appropriate, will provide examples of student work that illustrate the expected learning." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 19]

Within a reference set, a wide range of examples provides those in the educational community with a comprehensive set of samples of students' work at different levels. Collectively, the samples can provide rich detail about actual student performance and illustrate the range of ideas presented in the descriptions.

2. Comparisons

In educational contexts, judgments about learning require the comparing of a sample of a student's performance with some reference. In current practice, a student's work is compared to that of others in the class or grade, or compared to his or her other work, or compared to curriculum expectations. Teachers use this comparison to alter the learning environment to account for individual differences of students and learner needs and as a basis for reporting to the student or parent. The assessment/evaluation process being proposed involves the comparison of individual performance to a reference set.

"Continuous learning... recognizes that learners have different preferred ways of learning, that learning does not progress in a linear fashion, and that learners may sometimes appear to retrace earlier steps." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 19]

3. Expectations

Expectations about student performance are what we believe students should be able to do. Comparing several samples of a student's work with the examples in the reference sets will assist the student, teacher, or

parent to establish expectations and to plan appropriate learning experiences for that student.

4. Requirements
The requirement that an individual or group meet a set of expectations may be appropriate for a purpose such as credentialling in the Graduation Program. However, requirements are not necessarily a part of standards-setting for students in the Primary and Intermediate Programs.

"Teachers should base their evaluations on a multiplicity of evidence, including participation by students in classroom discussions, project work, and one-on-one interviews in addition to written exercises and tests." [A Legacy for Learners, p. 111]

Using Standards

At the individual level, standards can be used to improve a student's educational program by:

- identifying student progress;
- providing a basis for reporting progress and giving direction to student improvement;
- determining which personal learning goals are appropriate to the learner and assisting the learner in making sound program decisions;
- facilitating the development of personalized educational programs.

"Learner-focused curriculum and assessment is developmentally appropriate, allows for continuous learning, provides for self-direction, meets the individual learning needs of students as much as possible, and deals with matters of relevance to learners." [The Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, p. 9]

Communicating About Standards

Once standards are developed, they need to be broadly communicated so that they are widely understood by all concerned, including the public. Richly and comprehensively exemplified standards allow students, teachers, and parents to base their evaluations on a wide range of examples of actual student performances. In this way, assessment procedures concentrate on collecting information about what individual learners can do in relation to expectations about the types of learning children regularly exhibit as they grow.

By involving the educational community in the assessment and evaluation process, standards can assist in the refining or setting of goals and in judging the extent to which previously set goals have been attained. To communicate about student performance, the school uses a variety of documents and procedures such as report cards, telephone calls, notes, and comments on students' work. These communications are an important source of information to parents and students. They provide an opportunity to recognize and support a student's progress as a developing learner. This feedback is important to the growth of a student's self-concept, making the constructive use of standards important to his or her further development.

At the graduation level, the school system uses the above mentioned documents and procedures as well as transcripts and graduation certificates to communicate about student performance.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR CHANGE

The following proposes a change in direction for assessment, evaluation, and reporting and describes some specific changes being investigated at the provincial level. The development and implementation of "new ways" of looking at learning require time, money, energy, training, retraining, and research at both the classroom and provincial levels. At the same time, new ways of organizing learning will create changes within schools that have the potential to cause anxiety for those who comprise the educational community: practitioners, students, parents, the community, and post-secondary institutions. The plan for the development of standards that is congruent with the Program directions suggested by The Royal Commission considers the fact that such large-scale change must be managed carefully and sensitively.

Encouraging Change

Student assessment in the classroom should be a productive and positive component of the learning environment and be an integral part of the teaching-learning process. The objective is to make assessment and evaluation more responsive to individual student needs and to parents' desire to know more about program modifications made for their child. The Ministry encourages the following changes in emphases at the classroom level:

Moving From	*Moving Towards*
Classroom assessment as a reporting tool.	Classroom assessment to support teaching and learning.
Failing young children who do not meet pre-set expectations for behaviour or ability to do tasks.	Providing children with the support needed to allow them to make continuous progress.
Teacher reporting primarily to parent only.	Teacher involves parent and student in a discussion of progress.
Teachers' reliance on paper and pencil tests.	A broadened repertoire of assessment strategies for teachers including portfolio, performance tests, and self-evaluations.
Assessing progress relative to the class and/or grade.	Assessing progress compared to stated criteria.
Assessment criteria controlled by the teacher.	Assessment criteria negotiated by student and teacher.

To capture the broadest range of student achievement and to give credence to many observation techniques already in use in classrooms, teachers' repertoires of assessment strategies need to be expanded to include activities such as authentic assessments. Authentic assessments intend to describe student performance using activities that are virtually indistinguishable from those used as part of the regular classroom instruction process. When developed, the new strategies must be learner-focused and, at the same time, they must be manageable in the classroom.

Planning for Change

At the provincial level, the work of the Ministry to clearly articulate standards that support learning is moving in the following directions:

Moving From	*Moving Towards*
Provincial examinations offered twice in a school year.	Provincial examinations offered more frequently.
Provincial Learning Assessment by subject.	Provincial Learning Assessment based on learning dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
Provincial Learning Assessment primarily informs curriculum development.	Provincial Learning Assessment informs, as well, the development of classroom assessment resources.
Teachers relate student performance to criteria that are vaguely or not stated.	Teachers relate student performance to criteria that are explicitly and clearly stated.
Graduation criteria established by educators only.	Graduation criteria established with input from all partners in education .

In reporting, the intent of the Ministry is to move away from the sole reliance on letter grades and to move towards the use of descriptions and examples of student performance (e.g., in areas such as writing and problem-solving). The management of this change will require time, effort, and collaboration among the various stakeholders in the educational community.

The following outlines some of the specific changes proposed by the Ministry:

Reference Sets

Reference sets are based on the learning dimensions -- i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They offer a method for observing, evaluating, and reporting on student performance. A reference set consists of concise descriptions, representative samples of student performance at different levels, some indication of the range of performance on a provincial basis, and includes examples of assessment strategies to assist teachers in their use of the sets. Specifically, they provide resources for teachers to relate their observations of individual student performance to the actual range of performances observed in the total population within a particular age range.

Currently, the research and development of reference sets is in its early stages, with some prototype material developed. In Communication Skills (writing), for example, the prototype material developed so far includes descriptions of students' writing, showing increasing levels of performance. To support the descriptions, the set includes the characteristics of each description level, samples of students' work, and comments linking the samples to the characteristics of a particular description. The following illustrates the components of a reference set using examples from the Communication Skills (writing) prototype.

The Prototype for Communication Skills (Writing) Includes:

A Set of Concise Descriptions

Representative Samples of Student Performance

A Chart to Illustrate Ranges of Performance of Students in British Columbia

Description 4: Communication Skills (writing)

Students' writing can be read, understood, and retold by other readers. Students can take on different roles and points of view in their writing. They **use writing to help organize** and work through their ideas, and can follow a topic through several pages. They can **summarize** ideas and provide supporting details. They can communicate ideas and concepts in mathematics, science, social studies, and literature. They use different writing forms including paragraphs, extended writing, lists, letters, notes, poetry, graphs, charts, and diagrams. They choose specific words and forms to emphasize important ideas and to create effects.

Example 1

I have decided that it would be better to build the houses and buildings on the hillsides. It may cost more but it won't upset the atmosphere. Or the farmland that way it would produce more food from the farmlands.

Sincerely, the Mayor

writes from the point-of-view of the mayor of a fictional town making a difficult decision

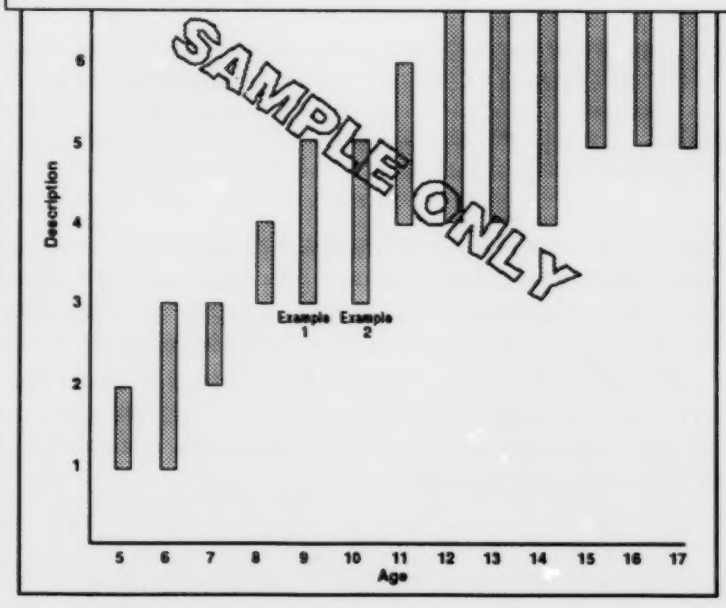
summarizes the decision, and supplies information to support the decision

Example 2

About Forests

What I (think I) know	What I want to find out	What I learned
many animals and plant live in a forest it takes a long time for a forest to grow loggers cut down trees people camp in forests people use wood to build things and to burn wood to keep warm	what would happen if there were no more trees? what can people use instead of wood?	people from all over the world use wood from BC wood is used for paper but people can recycle paper instead. people plant new trees after the other trees are cut down. some people think what they are doing is logging

uses writing to organize ideas about forests during a longer unit on resources in British Columbia



Reference sets can:

- form a basis for continuous learning;
- assist teachers, students, and parents in planning appropriate learning experiences for students;
- provide evidence of growth over time;
- help teachers evaluate and report on student performance based on samples of students' work collected from throughout the province;
- encourage positive evaluation and reporting that emphasizes what students can do;
- provide a common set of references to help educators, students, and parents communicate about student performance;
- clarify widely-held expectations of student performance to provide province-wide standards.

Reference sets must be constructed from tasks that are based on what a majority of students are actually capable of doing at different ages. Therefore, standards, when expressed in terms of these reference sets, are empirically derived or verified, using a broad range of samples of actual student performance.

The Ministry proposes to co-develop reference sets with teachers and other educators. For reference sets to be effective they must be usable in the classroom and provide the information that students, parents, and teachers require to assist in communication about student performance. Classroom teacher-researchers and panels of stakeholders should review the reference sets in light of widely-held expectations of what students are able to do. The standards should be determined based on the expertise and experience of teachers, appropriate learning or cognitive theory, and suitable curriculum/assessment theory. The appropriateness of such standards can be verified through an adaptation of the present Provincial Learning Assessment Program.

The development of reference sets will require several years. As the timeline proposes, the development of reference sets will proceed in concert, as much as is possible, with the implementation of the Year 2000 Programs and the other assessment and evaluation initiatives.

Provincial Learning Assessment Program

The Sullivan Royal Commission on Education stated that "The task of assessing individual students' performance should remain primarily the responsibility of classroom teachers." Further, the Commission pointed out that the Ministry of Education should provide guidance on standards and criteria for teachers to employ in evaluating students' performance. To this end, Provincial Learning Assessment Program will help to determine and further validate expectations for learners as described in reference sets. Further, the following modifications will be made:

- Several assessment packages will be made available for districts to use in subsequent years, to obtain school- and/or district-level data for the improvement of instruction. These packages would include performance tasks with observational guidelines. These packages would allow schools and/or districts to select assessment procedures that support identified priorities and to administer them at their convenience, minimizing the amount of intrusion into classroom instructional time.
- The Provincial Learning Assessment Program will be designed to yield data only at the provincial level. A complete assessment package will be made available for districts to obtain school-level data for the improvement of instruction.
- As part of the assessment process, the Provincial Learning Assessment Program will draw upon performance and portfolio assessment techniques to a greater extent than in the past.
- To become more congruent with the directions of the Commission, the Provincial Learning Assessment Program will realign its subject focus. Currently, subjects such as those in the Fine and Practical Arts are not assessed, nor are subjects grouped into strands. In the future, these assessments will be restructured to allow reporting to reflect the learning dimensions as well as particular subjects.

Credentialling and Examinations

New ways of organizing for learning require new ways of approaching assessment and evaluation, including examinations. The Ministry intends to investigate with the educational community methods of changing the examination program to make it more congruent with the *Year 2000* initiatives. For example:

- The nature and format of examinations as they currently exist is presently under review.
- The possibility of having written and/or oral tests produced by community groups for Heritage and Native languages is under consideration.
- The use of computer technology to improve the development, relevance, and delivery of the provincial examination program is being explored.
- The Ministry is examining the feasibility of granting scholarships for single subjects as opposed to granting them on the total of a student's three best subjects. This will assist those students who have a specific talent.
- The Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights is entering into discussions with the Ministries of Advanced Education and of Labour to establish credentialling procedures for career preparation and apprenticeship programs.

Further to the review of the nature of examinations, the following modifications are under consideration:

- incorporating into the examination process a wider variety of assessment techniques, e.g., performance assessments;
- expanding credentialling to include the areas of Fine and Practical Arts and other subjects not currently examined;
- developing a system to offer examinations on a more frequent basis;
- permitting students to rewrite examinations several times if they so wish;
- allowing students to "challenge" the course requirements, including the Provincial Examinations, where appropriate. A school assessment component (60%) is required before a Provincial Credit will be awarded. However, this component should also be subject to challenge, based on criteria set by the district concerned using provincial guidelines;
- using one examination in the assessment of students for Provincial and Scholarship Examination purposes. In the case of Provincial Examinations, the results will be combined with school examination results (40% : 60% respectively).

Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting Strategies at the Classroom Level

Currently, classroom assessments tend to be largely paper-and-pencil tests. In response to Year 2000 directions, initiatives in this area are directed towards providing educators with resources to support the use of alternative strategies, such as performance and portfolio assessments. These assessments describe student performance using activities that are similar to those used as part of the regular classroom instruction process. Collecting information in this way encourages teachers to use more descriptive and informative reporting techniques. New ways of reporting are under development in concert with the development of new strategies.

V. PROPOSED TIMELINES

The proposed timelines take into consideration the time required to thoroughly investigate, design, develop, and field test each aspect of the various projects described in this paper. The development of new ways of approaching assessment and evaluation will require extensive research and ongoing collaboration with the educational community. In some instances, the initial part of the research investigates the feasibility of all or part of a project. Therefore, there is the possibility that, based on the findings, some projects may be redirected.

Reference Set Development

Project	Fall '91	Spring '92	Fall '92	Spring '93	Fall '93	Spring '94	Fall '94	Spring '95
Communication Skills (Written)	Prototype Development	Field research and standard setting	1st version in schools	Provincial Learning Assessment	Interpretation of Provincial Learning Assessment	Validated sets to schools	Implementation	
Communication Skills (3 other sets)	Research and developmental work	Prototypes	Field research and standard setting	Provincial Learning Assessment	Interpretation of Provincial Learning Assessment	Validated sets to schools	Implementation	
Problem-solving	Prototype development	Field research and standard setting	Field research and standard setting	1st version in schools	1st version in schools	Provincial Learning Assessment	Interpretation of Provincial Learning Assessment	Validated sets to schools
Concept of self (self-respect, self-confidence, self-motivation)	Research	Research and developmental work	Prototype development	Field Research	Field research and standard setting	1st version in schools	1st version in schools	Review process
Life Management	Research	Research	Research and developmental work	Prototype development	Field Research	Field research and standard setting	1st version in schools	1st version in schools

Credentialling and Examinations

Project	Fall '91	Spring '92	Fall '92	Spring '93	Fall '93	Spring '94	Fall '94	Spring '95
Common exam for Provincial and Scholar-ship purposes	Research	Review of research to determine feasibility of proposal	If feasible, introduce Common Exam for Provincial and Scholarship purposes	Introduce Common Exam for Provincial and Scholarship purposes	Introduce Common Exam for Provincial and Scholar-ship purposes			
Electronic exam delivery	Research	Research	Commence field testing to create electronically stored questions	Continue field testing to create electronically stored questions	Field testing continues Pilot hard copy computer generated exams	Field testing continues Pilot hard copy computer generated exams	Field testing continues Pilot hard copy computer generated exams	Field testing continues All exams computer generated
Marker credential-ling	Planning and research	Establish committee from BCTF and College of Teachers	Establish Marker Credential-ling clinics	Review process	Review process	Decision		

Performance Assessment

Project	Fall '91	Spring '92	Fall '92	Spring '93	Fall '93	Spring '94	Fall '94	Spring '95
Anecdotal Reporting: Primary and Intermediate	Packages for field testing completed	Field testing	Final copies available					
Performance Assessment Strategies	Primary field test package available	Field testing of Primary package	Copies of Primary package available	Continue Development and field testing of Assessment materials	Continue Development and field testing of Assessment materials	Continue Development and field testing of Assessment materials	Continue Development and field testing of Assessment materials	Continue Development and field testing of Assessment materials
Assessment Video Series	Planning	Development of video support materials	Development of video support materials	Development of video support materials	Development of video support materials			
Assessment Strategies Packages in support of Reference Sets	Research and consultation	Research and consultation	Development of Written Communications and Problem solving	Field testing of Written Communications and Problem solving Development of 3 other Communications	Refinement of Written Communications and Problem solving Field testing of 3 other Communications	Distribute final copies of Written Communications and Problem solving Refinement of 3 other Communications	Distribute final copies of 3 other Communications	

Vern A. Burkhardt
Queen's Printer for British Columbia©
Victoria, 1992

MR 2385